

Department of the Interior  
**Departmental Manual**

**Effective Date:**

**Series:** Public Lands

**Part 620:** Wildland Fire Management

**Chapter 5:** Rural Fire Assistance

**Originating Office:** Office of Wildland Fire Coordination

**620 DM 5**

**5.1 Introduction.** This chapter provides Departmental policy, principles, objectives, procedures, and standards for administration of the Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) program.

**5.2 Authority.** The statutes cited herein authorize the implementation of the RFA program on lands under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior, or lands adjacent thereto.

- A. Protection of Timber Act of September 20, 1922 (42 Stat. 857; 16 U.S.C. 594)
- B. McSweeney-McNary Act of 1928 (45 Stat. 221; 16 U.S.C. 487)
- C. Taylor Grazing Act of June 28, 1934 as amended (48 Stat. 1269; 43 U.S.C. 315)
- D. National Park Service Act as amended (67 Stat. 495; 16 U.S.C. 1b)
- E. Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 as amended (40 U.S.C. 471; et seq.)
- F. Reciprocal Fire Protection Act of May 27, 1955 as amended (69 Stat. 66; 42 U.S.C. 1856a)
- G. National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended (80 Stat. 927; 16 U.S.C. 668dd through 668ee)
- H. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (90 Stat. 2743)

- I. Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977 (P.L. 95-224, as amended by P.L. 97-258, September 13, 1982) (96 Stat. 1003; 31 U.S.C. 6301 through 6308)
- J. Supplemental Appropriation Act of September 10, 1982 (96 Stat. 837)
- K. Wildfire Suppression Assistance Act of 1989 (P.L. 100-428, as amended by P.L. 101-11, April 7, 1989)
- L. Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act as amended (P.L. 93-638)
- M. National Indian Resources Management Act (P.L. 101-630 November 28, 1990)
- N. Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-413)
- O. Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, Fiscal Year 2001 (P.L. 106-291)
- P. National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-57)
- Q. Economy Act of June 30, 1932 (47 Stat. 417; 31 U.S.C. 1535 – 1536)
- R. Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999 (113 Stat. 1486 et seq.; P.L. 106-107)

**5.3 Definitions.** (For the purposes of this chapter)

- A. Advance. A payment made to a recipient of a fully-executed and awarded grant or cooperative agreement before outlays are made by the recipient, as negotiated and within federal agency guidelines.
- B. Agency Administrator. The line manager having direct organizational responsibility for management of an administrative unit.
- C. Assistance Agreement. One of two legal instruments, either a cooperative agreement or a grant, that provides assistance through funding, property, services or anything of value for performance of a project that accomplishes a public purpose as authorized by law.
- D. Award. A fully executed legal instrument (cooperative agreement or grant) that authorizes the transfer of funds for obligation or collection purposes, or the transfer of property in lieu of money, by the federal government to an eligible recipient.
- E. Capital Assets. Equipment, property or improvements which increase the value of real property, such as; utility, hydrant systems or sprinkler systems.

F. Cash Contribution. A monetary payment borne by the recipient of the federally-assisted project or program arrangement.

G. Cooperator. The entity supplying assistance to a project or program under a grant or cooperative agreement with a federal agency.

H. Cooperative Agreement. A written agreement used where the primary benefit is to provide public support or stimulus, rather than to acquire goods and services for the direct benefit or use of the federal government.

I. Equipment. Tangible, nonexpendable items having a useful life of more than one year.

J. Grant. An award of financial assistance in the form of money by the federal government to an eligible grantee, where involvement in the project by the federal government is expected to be minimal.

K. In-kind Contributions. A recipient's non-monetary matching share of federal financial assistance that has monetary value and is donated or volunteered.

L. Matching Contributions. A recipient's share of federal financial assistance provided in the form of cash, in-kind, or a combination of both.

M. NFIRS. National Fire Incident Reporting System, a national system designed and maintained by the United States Fire Administration as a tool for fire departments to report and maintain computerized records of fires and other fire department responses in a uniform manner that enables analysis of trends on a local, State and national level.

N. NFPORS. National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System, a DOI /USDA Internet-based record of interagency wildland fire management program accomplishments.

O. Prevention. Activities directed at reducing the losses from fires, including public education, law enforcement, personal contact, and reduction of hazardous fuels.

P. Recipient. The organizational entity that receives a grant or cooperative agreement, and assumes legal and financial responsibility and accountability both for the awarded funds and for the performance of the grant or cooperative agreement-supported activity.

Q. Rural Community. A single city, town, village, borough, or community with a population of 10,000 or less.

R. Rural Fire Department. A recognized organization providing primary fire protection to a rural area and/or to a rural community with a population of 10,000 or less.

S. Rural Fire District. An organization established to provide fire protection to a designated geographic area or areas outside of those under municipal fire protection.

T. Rural Fire Protection. Fire protection and public safety services that are outside of areas under municipal fire protection, prevention and building regulations.

U. Substantial Role. Regular, consistent response to wildland fires on or near DOI-protected areas as a cooperator, as defined and authorized in existing DOI bureau and/or State Reciprocal Fire Protection agreements.

V. Supplies. Items generally having a useful life of less than one year.

W. Suppression. A management action intended to protect identified values from a fire, extinguish a fire, or alter a fire's direction of spread.

X. Wildland Fire. Any non-structure fire that occurs on wildland.

Y. Wildland -Urban Interface (WUI). The area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuel.

## **5.4 Objectives**

A. Improvement of safety, enhancement of firefighting resource capability, and readiness of rural fire departments that play a substantial role responding to wildland fires on or near DOI-protected lands.

B. Reduction of wildland fire-related losses to rural economies through enhanced local fire protection.

C. Reduction of federal, State, Tribal and local expenditures on wildland fire suppression, particularly in the wildland-urban interface.

## **5.5 Responsibilities**

A. The Office of Wildland Fire Coordination (OWFC) develops, implements, and coordinates DOI wildland fire management policy and programs, monitors bureau compliance with Departmental policy, develops and issues program implementation guidance, and coordinates with other wildland fire management agencies.

B. The Bureau Directors of the BIA, BLM, FWS, and NPS are responsible to delegate responsibility appropriately for management of their respective bureau RFA programs, ensure compliance with Departmental policy, and approve supplemental agency directives.

C. The Agency Administrators are responsible for program implementation, administration, collaboration and coordination, tracking of program budget and performance, and compliance with applicable federal grant and assistance agreement administration laws.

## **5.6 Policy**

A. The Rural Fire Assistance program will provide funding to assist rural fire departments (RFD) protecting rural communities that meet the following criteria:

- 1) The RFD serves a community with a population of 10,000 or less that is situated near DOI lands;
- 2) The RFD is party to DOI bureau and /or State Reciprocal Fire Protection Agreements; and
- 3) The RFD plays a substantial role in wildland fire suppression activities on or near DOI-protected lands, as defined and authorized in DOI bureau and/or State Reciprocal Fire Protection Agreements.

B. Use of funds is limited to wildland fire training, equipment, supplies and wildland fire prevention activities.

C. Bureaus that receive RFA program funds will jointly cooperate, collaborate and coordinate to:

- 1) Review competitive applications for rural fire assistance awards and share pertinent information regarding pending assistance applications and awards with other agencies and partners, as appropriate;
- 2) Coordinate application procedures, reporting, and evaluation criteria; and
- 3) Share program information with other agencies and partners on a regular basis.

D. Bureaus will encourage and facilitate coordination and cooperation, as appropriate, with Tribes, States, State Foresters, the USDA Forest Service, and the DHS, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), United States Fire Administration.

## **5.7 Compliance with Laws and Codes**

A. Grant announcements will be consistent with applicable sections of the *Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999* (P.L. 106-107) and accompanying Office of Management and Budget policy and guidance.

B. Grants and agreements will be administered in accordance with applicable sections of 43 CFR 12.

## **5.8 Program Awards**

A. Funding. Funding for RFA program awards will be provided by the Wildland Fire Management activity, Rural Fire Assistance subactivity.

B. Distribution of Funds. Awards may be distributed to rural fire districts or departments directly, or to States or local governments, where it is determined to increase program effectiveness and enhance collaborative efforts.

C. Annual Award Limit. Awards to individual departments may not exceed annual limits determined by the OWFC.

D. Matching Contribution Requirement. Award recipients must contribute an established minimum percentage of project costs, as determined by the OWFC, either as cash or in-kind goods and services.

E. In-kind goods and services.

- 1) Shall not be derived from other federal assistance programs;
- 2) Shall be assessed for their value using scales and estimates appropriate for the local area, with concurrence of the Agency Administrator and cooperators;
- 3) Shall not be in-kind contributions assessed toward cost matching requirements for any other federal grant; and
- 4) Shall not include grant administrative costs and grant application preparation fees.

## **5.9 Program Expenditures**

A. Allowable Expenditures.

- 1) RFA funds shall be used exclusively for the purchase of equipment to enhance safety, capacity or effectiveness of rural fire department wildland firefighting operations; to fund training and instruction in wildland firefighting operations; and to fund wildland fire prevention activities and related materials.
- 2) Equipment purchased with RFA funds must meet applicable prescribed federal standards and technical specifications.
- 3) Agency Administrators shall be responsible for ensuring program expenditures comply with policy and related guidance.

**B. Prohibited Expenditures.**

1) RFA funds shall not be used for the purchase of real property, capital assets or construction.

2) RFA funds shall not be used by recipients for grant administrative costs, or grant preparation fees.

C. Administrative Fees and Related Overhead Costs. In instances where RFA funds are administered by a State, bureaus may negotiate reasonable compensation for those services, provided RFA account funds are not used for this purpose.

**5.10 Obligation and Liquidation of Funds**

A. RFA funds are expected to be obligated by bureaus within 90 days of Executive approval of the annual DOI appropriations law.

B. RFA funds must be liquidated by recipients within 12 months of receipt of the award.

C. Funds not liquidated within established periods will be returned promptly to the federal government.

**5.11 Reporting**

A. National Fire Plan Performance Report. Bureaus will report all RFA program accomplishments in the National Fire Plan Performance Report in the prescribed format.

B. National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System (NFPORS). Bureaus will utilize NFPORS for tracking, managing and reporting accomplishments and /or in other formats and systems, as required by OWFC. Accomplishments will be reported on a continuous basis.

C. Financial Reporting. Recipients will document expenditures as outlined in Office of Management and Budget requirements, 43 CFR 12, Subpart C, and other applicable federal law.

D. National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). To maintain program eligibility, rural fire departments and/or districts must enter incident response data into NFIRS upon initial receipt of RFA awards, and thereafter, effective October 1, 2007.

**5.12 Accountability**

A. Records Management. Agency Administrators will ensure recipients manage RFA program records in accordance with 43 CFR section 12.82.

B. Property Management. Agency Administrators will direct recipient management of equipment and supplies in accordance with 43 CFR sections 12.72-73 to ensure its proper use, care, security, and disposition.

C. Program Monitoring. Recipients will monitor management of grants pursuant to guidelines in 43 CFR 12.

D. Program Evaluation. Bureaus, in collaboration with the OWFC, will cooperatively establish and implement consistent measures to quantify the RFA program's effectiveness in meeting program goals and objectives.

E. Annual Year End Closeout Reports. Agency Administrators will ensure recipients file annual closeout reports incorporating applicable elements as described in 43 CFR section 12.90, and any other information deemed necessary by OWFC for evaluation of program effectiveness and performance.

F. Enforcement of Compliance with Requirements. Agency Administrators are responsible to ensure recipient compliance with terms and conditions of grants and agreements and will employ remedies for noncompliance as articulated in 43 CFR section 12.83.